

Writing a Great Research Paper: Picking an A+ Topic *Study Guide*

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Writing a Great Research Paper: Picking an A+ Topic

1 DVD · 1 hr. 22 mins.

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Writing a Great Research Paper: Picking an A+ Topic Study Guide

Introduction

Selecting the right topic for your research paper is a crucial first step toward earning a high grade. In this superb program, you'll review the fundamentals of academic writing as you discover the secrets of choosing that elusive "perfect topic"! You'll learn to narrow your focus from a broad subject to a manageable topic, then from an intriguing research question to a strong working thesis.

For easier studying and maximum success, we recommend that you view the program over a number of short sessions: don't try to absorb too much at one time. Review the entire program, or specific sections, as many times as you find necessary in order to master the material.

Perhaps most importantly: Don't forget to take advantage of your "pause" button while viewing the program. Keep plenty of scrap paper handy so you can jot down ideas, work through concepts, and more. And finally, be sure to use the myriad on-screen graphics to take notes for yourself—when you're done, you'll have a notebook you can refer back to again and again.

About Your Instructor

Karl Weber, M.A., is an educator, editor, and bestselling author in fields ranging from business to politics to test preparation. He has worked on books with such noted figures as management guru Adrian Slywotzky, Loews Hotels CEO Jonathan M. Tisch, and President Jimmy Carter.

Part 1: What Is a Research Paper?

The Definition of a Research Paper

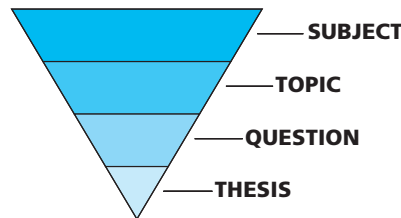
A research paper is a paper that:

- presents an original approach to some academic topic,
- organized around a central thesis,
- using insights based on research, and
- citing sources in a scholarly fashion.

Part 2: From Subject to Topic

The Hierarchy of a Research Paper

Research papers (and most examples of scholarly writing) follow the following hierarchy, focusing down from a highly general subject to a highly specific thesis:



What Is **Your** Subject?

If you were assigned a subject, write it here: _____

If you were **not** assigned a subject, consider these strategies:

- #1. Look at the Table of Contents in the textbook for the course you're studying. Which chapter, part, or section names cover people, things, places, events, or ideas that you have found especially interesting? Your subject could be one of these general areas.
- #2. Take a stroll through the library or bookstore, paying careful attention to books, periodicals, and other media that are related to the course you're studying. Your subject could be one of the general areas covered by these materials.
- #3. Ask your teachers or professors for some guidance: In their experience, what sorts of subjects have their most successful students covered in their research papers? What sorts of subjects have they rarely seen a research paper cover but would find most interesting?

List some potential subjects here (later, when you decide on your specific subject, circle it):

What Is **Your** Topic?

If you were assigned a topic, write it here: _____

If you were **not** assigned a topic, consider these strategies for exploring various facets of your subject in order to focus on a topic:

- #1. Think about an important turning point in the events within your subject. Your topic could relate to the causes or effects of this turning point.
- #2. Think about some fact you discovered that surprised you about your subject, something that thwarted your expectations. What made it surprising? Why did you expect something else? Your topic could relate to why your expectations were wrong.
- #3. Think about an oversimplification that is commonly made regarding your subject. Your topic could relate to the complexities that undermine this oversimplification.
- #4. Think about a trend or “story” that connects several different events within your subject. Your topic could relate to connecting these events together, tracing the trend or “story” along the way.
- #5. Think about two or more situations or personalities within your subject that have qualities that are either similar or different. What caused them to have these qualities? What effects did these qualities have? Your topic could relate to comparing and/or contrasting these situations or personalities.
- #6. Take a stroll through the library or bookstore, paying careful attention to books, periodicals, and other media that are related to the course you’re studying. When you find an interesting topic that is only addressed in about a dozen or so materials, consider addressing a similar or related topic in your research paper.
- #7. Ask your teachers or professors for some guidance: In their experience, what sorts of topics have their most successful students covered in their research papers? What sorts of topics have they rarely seen a research paper cover but would find most interesting?

Your topic shouldn’t be so broad that literally hundreds of books or articles have been written about it (in which case it would be too broad, and thus large enough to be considered a subject).

Your topic shouldn’t be so narrow that only a handful of books or articles have been written about it (in which case it would be too narrow, and thus you would not be able to locate sufficient research sources).

A good topic:

- is not merely a narrative,
- is not too broad,
- is not too narrow,
- has research sources,
- has not been overdone, and
- interests you.

As you do your background reading, look for:

- a topic that interests you,
- a topic about which a good amount of research material appears to be available, and
- a question that seems intriguing, is not obvious, and that is the right scope for your paper to answer (neither too broad nor too narrow).

Writing a Great Research Paper: Picking an A+ Topic

List some potential topics here (later, when you decide on your specific topic, circle it):

Part 3: A Working Thesis

What Is **Your** Question?

Your research question is just the question or “puzzle” about the topic that your research paper will attempt to answer or solve.

List some potential questions here (later, when you decide on your specific question, circle it):

What Is **Your** Working Thesis?

A working thesis is a hypothetical answer to your research question—one that will guide you during your research. It probably won’t be the exact thesis you’ll discuss in your final research paper, but it might be.

A good working thesis:

- can be stated in a single clear sentence,
- is a positive, non-obvious statement, and
- can be tested through research.

List some potential working theses here (later, when you decide on your specific working thesis, circle it):
